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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [KTFN](#) [KISL](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: S/CT URBANCIC DISCUSSES ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE
PROTECTION AND COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION WITH GOAJ
OFFICIALS

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) Summary: S/CT Principal Deputy Counterterrorism Coordinator Urbancic's February 14-15 visit to Baku reaffirmed USG appreciation for Azerbaijan's cooperation in the war on terror and underscored USG interest in deepening bilateral CT cooperation. GOAJ officials confirmed they are working on the U.S. critical energy infrastructure (CEIP) questions. Presidential Security Chief Akhundov, responsible for onshore pipeline security, identified Sangachal terminal and the nearby coast and airspace as a key CEIP security concern. A GOAJ commission chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Sharifov is the focal point for the GOAJ's CEIP efforts, according to Akhundov, although GOAJ interagency cooperation remains a challenge. MNS chief Mahmudov welcomed closer CT cooperation with the U.S., and said Azerbaijan apprehends 120-150 terrorism suspects each year, including three separate groups in 2007; he is worried about the increasing number and diversity of terrorism groups operating in Azerbaijan. GOAJ officials sent mixed messages on how seriously they consider the threat posed by reported PKK activity in Nagorno-Karabakh. GRPO will follow up with the MNS, which has the lead mandate on CT issues. End Summary.

12. (C) Urbancic met with the following GOAJ officials on February 14-15: Minister of National Security (MNS) Eldar Mahmudov, Presidential Administration Security Aide Major-General Vahid Aliyev, Chief of the Presidential Security Service (PSS) Lieutenant-General Vagif Akhundov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Araz Azimov, Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA) Ramil Usubov, Deputy Minister of Justice (MOJ) Vilayat Zahirov, and Deputy Ministers of Emergency Situations (MES) Rafael Mirzayev and Orujali Hajiye. Urbancic and the Ambassador also had a February 15 lunch with Navy Chief of Staff Captain Yunis Mammadov and Deputy Chief of the State Border Service for International Relations Major-General Farhad Taghizade on the GOAJ's maritime energy infrastructure protection capabilities.

Energy Infrastructure Protection

13. (C) In his meetings with GOAJ officials, Urbancic asked for an early GOAJ response to the U.S. expert-level questions on Azerbaijan's critical energy infrastructure protection (CEIP) capabilities and plans. (Embassy provided the questions to the MFA in December; MFA has forwarded them to

the relevant GOAJ entities and has pledged to provide a consolidated response soon.) Several GOAJ officials noted that the GOAJ is actively working on the questions.

¶4. (C) PSS Chief Akhundov said a GOAJ commission on energy infrastructure was created in response to former President Heydar Aliyev's May 2002 decree on pipeline security. The commission reports to Prime Minister Artur Rasizade, but Deputy Prime Minister Abid Sharifov chairs the working group within the commission. This working group reports to Sharifov two times per year, and Sharifov in turn reports to Rasizade two times per year.

¶5. (C) According to Akhundov, the PSS has the lead responsibility for protecting Azerbaijan's on-shore energy infrastructure, particularly Sangachal terminal and Azerbaijan's oil and gas pipelines. Approximately 1,000 of PSS' 5,000 employees are devoted to PSS' CEIP mandate, Akhundov observed. PSS uses mobile and horse patrols, which grant access to difficult terrain, to protect Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure. PSS seeks to establish six regional offices -- some of which are operational -- where approximately 150 GOAJ representatives and 30-35 horses at each office will have responsibility for a specific geographic region. These offices will work closely with the local population to gather threat information. PSS also has a training center for responding to a CEIP threat; Akhundov hopes to include other relevant GOAJ entities in these exercises. Akhundov also said PSS works closely with the MNS, MIA, and BP, to include an "analytical center" where PSS, MNS, and MIA officers exchange information. Akhundov said Azerbaijan's key CEIP challenges are ensuring coordination among the security services and encouraging the exchange of information among GOAJ entities.

¶6. (C) Akhundov identified Sangachal terminal and the surrounding territory as his primary security concern. PSS has a layered security plan for protecting Sangachal -- in concert with BP's security team -- but protection for the shallow coastal area near the Sangachal terminal where the pipeline runs and the airspace above the terminal are important gaps in the PSS plan. Akhundov said the Navy and the Coast Guard are working to address the coastal gap. The Ministry of Defense is responsible for protecting Sangachal from a possible airborne attack, although Akhundov said he still needs to clarify this issue. Akhundov mentioned he has spoken to President Aliyev about buying two helicopters to address this gap.

Terrorism Issues

¶7. (S/NF) In a February 14 meeting, MNS chief Mahmudov reviewed Azerbaijan's close cooperation with the U.S. on counter-terrorism and security issues. Mahmudov said that, working with the U.S. and other partners in the international war on terrorism, Azerbaijan apprehends 120-150 terrorism suspects each year, including three separate groups in 2007. Characterizing this as a "significant" number, Mahmudov said he is worried about the increasing number and diversity of terrorism groups operating in Azerbaijan. Due to Azerbaijan's geographic position between the North Caucasus and Iran, terrorist groups historically sought to use Azerbaijan as a transit route; now, there is an increase in the number of terrorist groups targeting infrastructure and interests within Azerbaijan. Mahmudov said he was particularly worried about efforts by "radical clerics" to promote extremism, as well as the influence of Iran, which had backed and trained a group of Azerbaijani nationals seeking to surveil and attack economic infrastructure. Mahmudov offered strong support for the international community's efforts to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons program.

¶8. (S/NF) Mahmudov said he would welcome greater cooperation with the U.S. on these issues. Noting that the GOAJ planned

to present to parliament new counter terrorist financing/anti-money laundering legislation, Mahmudov said he would welcome technical assistance and training to help implement this legislation. The Ambassador urged early passage of the legislation to provide the legal framework necessary for additional training on implementation. He also sought greater training and assistance for the Ministry's Counter-Terrorism Unit, which Mahmudov said he would like to develop to U.S. standards. Mahmudov also identified counter-narcotics efforts as an area where Azerbaijan could use greater technical assistance, equipment and training. Mahmudov complained that the Iranians -- in spite of their bilateral agreements with the GOAJ -- have taken no steps to combat the flow of narcotics from Iran.

¶9. (C) Mahmudov's understanding of the threat posed by radical Islamic extremists is different than the perception of most other Azerbaijani ministries and agencies, which view terrorism primarily through the lens of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian terrorist groups that were active in the early 1990s. For example, MIA chief Usubov and MOJ Deputy Minister Zahirov both told Urbancic that Azerbaijan understands the problem of international terrorism, then described how Azerbaijan was the victim to a string of Armenian terrorist attacks in the early 1990s and the Khojaly "massacre" in 1992. Neither focused on the threat posed by Islamic extremism. Nonetheless, Usubov said Azerbaijan has made a "strategic choice" to cooperate with other partners in the fight against terrorism and expressed gratitude for US-Azerbaijani CT cooperation. Usubov twice acknowledged that the MNS is the lead bureaucratic entity with a counterterrorism mandate, saying specific CT issues should be broached with Mahmudov.

¶10. (C) Zahirov said a special commission within the Cabinet of Ministers is preparing a new law on the fight against terrorism. A Ministry of Justice representative participates in this commission, according to Zahirov. In response to Urbancic's question about the GOAJ's effort to stop Islamic

radicalization from occurring in prisons, Zahirov said prisoners convicted of "grave crimes" like terrorism are kept in cells holding 2-4 inmates (although terrorism suspects are not necessarily segregated from other inmates convicted of different "grave crimes") and the authorities closely watch such prisoners. In response to the DCM's question about how long terror suspects can be held in MNS detention before being released to the MOJ, Zahirov said the MNS can hold a terror suspect until a court verdict is given. When the DCM asked why Farhad Aliyev is still in MNS detention after a court verdict on his case, a visibly nervous Zahirov said this issue was "outside his portfolio."

¶11. (C) In his meetings with GOAJ officials, Urbancic stressed the importance of Azerbaijan passing its draft anti-money laundering law and counterterrorism finance law in a timely manner. Mahmudov and Zahirov indicated the Parliament would take up the issue soon. Usubov and Zahirov also said Azerbaijan hopes to issue biometric passports by 2012; this step would give the GOAJ another tool to stop terrorists and criminals.

PKK

¶12. (S/NF) GOAJ officials sent mixed messages on how seriously they consider the threat posed by reported PKK activity in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Presidential Security Aide Vahid Aliyev (who served as the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan's Minister of National Security from 1998 until 2002), the GOAJ rolled up a 25-member PKK cell in Nakhchivan in the late 1990s. Some of the members were tried and sentenced to Azerbaijani jails; others, according to Aliyev, were deported to their countries of origin including Kazakhstan. Explaining that the Soviet KGB had provided extensive support to the PKK during the Cold War, Aliyev said the PKK had developed transit routes to Iran, focused on the

"Green Border" areas. Aliyev alleged that the Russian and Armenian special services continued to support the PKK following the break-up of the Soviet Union, adding that he was surprised by the sophisticated equipment and weapons found on the PKK members arrested in Nakhchivan. According to Aliyev, the Nakhchivan group was arrested in the far western corner of the Autonomous Republic, close to what he described as established PKK transit routes into Armenia and Iran. Aliyev also alleged that Iranian and Armenian authorities turned a blind eye to PKK smuggling and transit routes through Nagorno Karabakh and seven Azerbaijani territories occupied by ethnic Armenian forces. Aliyev said complete information on the Nakhchivan PKK cell was available at the MNS, and offered to help facilitate the exchange of information with the MNS. (Although Urbancic raised PKK issues with Mahmudov, Mahmudov was noncommittal. GRPO plans to follow up through its channels.)

¶13. (C) According to MIA chief Usubov, the PKK has links with the Armenian intelligence service. Usubov -- like Tagizade and Zahirov -- argued that Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied territories are ungoverned spaces that the PKK uses as a safehaven to transit narcotics, which in turn funds the group's operations. Usubov focused on the uncontrolled border between Iran and the occupied territories as a drug transit route that Armenia, the separatists, and the PKK use. When Urbancic pressed for concrete evidence, Usubov suggested that Urbancic approach the MNS.

¶14. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov said a conceptual understanding of the nature of terrorism is important because different regions and countries define terrorism differently, and said he would welcome a stronger dialogue with the USG on this. He noted that terrorism-related issues in the South Caucasus often have an ethnic component, and expressed his concern about the potential for inter-regional cooperation between terrorist groups and ethnic groups. Azimov was interested in discussing the possible existence of PKK elements in Nagorno-Karabakh. While he said he had no concrete information to suggest that there were PKK in NK, he also could not exclude it, noting that sympathies exist between Armenians in NK and the PKK, as the Armenian Committee for State Security (KGB) was actively involved in Kurdish activities in the 1960-70 timeframe. When Urbancic

noted his efforts to increase awareness and measures against the PKK by European countries, Azimov said this could potentially result in the PKK needing a friendlier base of operations, which they may be able to find in NK. Azimov said that while Azerbaijan is working to improve CT coordination efforts through international entities such as NATO, OSCE, GUAM etc., he was not expecting much from any of these. He expressed a desire for Azerbaijan's CT capacity to increase.

¶15. (C) PSS Chief Akhundov downplayed the PKK threat in Azerbaijan, saying the organization's capabilities and assets in Azerbaijan are limited. Akhundov was skeptical about recent local press reports that the PKK is sending members to Nagorno-Karabakh, stating that opposition-linked press outlets seek to ignite tensions. Akhundov said, however, that the GOAJ has operational information that some PKK members went from Turkey to Iran to Nagorno-Karabakh. He made a point of differentiating Kurdish ethnicity from PKK sympathies.

¶16. (C) Deputy Chief of the State Border Service Tagizade said the volume of narcotics seizures by Azerbaijani officials has risen. In the 2001-2006 timeframe, Azerbaijani officials seized approximately 1,300 kilograms of drugs at onshore and offshore locations; in 2007, officials have seized 1,200 kilograms of narcotic substances. Tagizade pledged to send this information via official channels to DAO, and he asked for Post's assistance in obtaining EUCOM counternarcotics funds. Tagizade said U.S. assistance is particularly helpful in bolstering the GOAJ's ability to disrupt narcotraffickers, particularly as EU states are not

very forthcoming in providing CN assistance.

¶17. (S/NF) Over the last few months, the Azerbaijani opposition press has regularly printed allegations that the PKK is active in Nagorno Karabakh and the Occupied Territories. During Urbancic's meetings, the GOAJ provided little evidence to substantiate the press allegations. The GOAJ also makes regular allegations that ethnic Armenian separatists allow NK and the Occupied Territories to be used as smuggling routes for narcotics and weapons of mass destruction. Interestingly, we found most GOAJ interlocutors relatively restrained in their discussions with Urbancic, despite the opportunity to add PKK activities to the arguments to support their position that the territories must be returned to full GOAJ control. The PKK issue also ties into Azerbaijan's domestic politics, as a population of ethnic Kurds was displaced from the Occupied Territories and is believed to have close links to -- and representation among -- Azerbaijan's governing elite. To further complicate matters, former Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev, during his tenure as the Soviet KGB Chief, is believed to have played a key role in supporting the PKK. More recently, opposition papers have tried to link several prominent GOAJ officials, including Kamalladdin Heydarov, to the PKK. Getting to the truth of alleged PKK activity in NK and the Occupied Territories will take time and a great deal of discretion, but we will pursue this issue through GRPO and other channels.

¶18. (S/NF) COMMENT: Urbancic's expression of USG appreciation for Azerbaijan's cooperation in the GWOT and of our willingness to deepen that engagement, underscored by his visit to Baku, provided much needed affirmation for the GOAJ that the USG values Azerbaijan's efforts as a partner in fighting terrorism. The visit also added momentum to our efforts to encourage the GOAJ to strengthen protection of Azerbaijan's vulnerable energy infrastructure, and to pursue anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing legislation. We look forward to identifying concrete next steps to deepen CT cooperation in the context of our ongoing security consultations, to be reviewed during the visit of a team from Washington on February 25.

¶19. (U) S/CT Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Frank Urbancic has cleared on this cable.
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